



# The VOTER

LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF GREATER BIRMINGHAM

<http://www.lwvgb.org>

FEBRUARY 2017

## IN MEMORIAM – RUTH JACOB WRIGHT

Life Member and Champion of the League of Women Voters  
by Jean Johnson, LWVGB President

It is with a heavy heart that we report that Ruth J. Wright, Life Member of the League of Women Voters of Greater Birmingham, has passed away. She died peacefully on January 18<sup>th</sup>, 2017, at Brookwood Hospital due to respiratory complications. She was 93 years old. Ruth was an active leader in both the League of Women Voters of Greater Birmingham and of Alabama. She was a champion of the League and for all citizens of our community and state.

Ruth was the go-to person for LWVGB in the 1970s and '80s on the environment and conservation of natural resources. She worked to preserve our air and water quality and for wise land use. Ruth was particularly concerned about the land-transport of hazardous materials, especially nuclear materials, across Jefferson County and other Alabama counties.

Ruth was president of the League of Women Voters of Greater Birmingham, 1981-1983. She served at various times on the Board of Directors of both the LWV of Greater Birmingham and LWV of Alabama.

In the 1990s Ruth focused on public transit in the Greater Birmingham area, and worked tirelessly, along with another League champion, Jessie Tehranchi, to try to make good public transportation available to all.

Ruth worked to improve the fairness and efficiency of local government. She was a League leader in advocating for the County Manager in Jefferson County, a position that was created in 2009 and filled in 2011 by then Hoover Mayor Tony Petelos.

These are some highlights of Ruth's many works. There is virtually no public issue in which she was not involved. For decades she was a regular observer of the Jefferson County Commission and the Birmingham-Jefferson County Transit Authority and an advocate for League issues in Jefferson County and in Montgomery. Ruth participated in many local and state League studies - wrote study plans, participated in the research, and often drafted League positions following member consensus.

Ruth's obituary will be published in *The Birmingham News* and [al.com](http://al.com) on Friday, February 3<sup>rd</sup> and Sunday, February 5<sup>th</sup>. We wanted you to be aware of the many, many contributions she made to the League of Women Voters, information that might not be included in that. She will be deeply missed as a friend and a League colleague.

**Please join us for a celebration of Ruth's life on Saturday, February 11<sup>th</sup> at 2:00 at the [Unitarian Universalist Church of Birmingham](#), 4300 Hampton Heights Drive (off West Valley Avenue, at the second traffic light west of I-65).**

Our deepest sympathy goes out to her son and daughter-in-law, Jim and Nina Wright.

*Please note that this news does not pertain to Ruth L. Wright, also a champion of the League of Women Voters, who is doing well. Ruth L. Wright is a leader of the LWV of East Alabama and LWV of Alabama.*

### CALENDAR OF EVENTS HIGHLIGHTS

Mark your calendar. See this issue or [LWVGB Online Calendar](#) for event details.

- February 7: AL Legislative Regular Session
- February 11: Ruth Wright's Memorial Service
- February 14: LWV Birthday
- February 15: President's Day
- February 23: Observer Corps Social
- February 27: 2017-18 Program Input Deadline
- February 28: LWVGB Board Meeting
- March 2017: Women's History Month
- March 8: International Women's Day
- March 12-16: Sunshine Week
- March 28: LWVGB Board Meeting
- April 22: Earth Day
- April 23-29: National Volunteer Week
- April 25: LWVGB Board Meeting
- April 27: LWVGB Annual Business Meeting
- April 29-30: LWVAL Convention; Mobile



### LWVGB Program Planning for 2017-18

Submit your suggestions for LWVGB  
Program changes by 2/27/17.

Contact: [Jean Johnson](#)

Review current LWVGB Program [here](#).

# REVITALIZATION OF THE LWVGB OBSERVER CORPS

## Jean Johnson, LWVGB President

The League of Women Voters of Greater Birmingham is pleased to announce that, with the help of several prominent Greater Birmingham community leaders, our Observer Corps is in the process of strong and vigorous revitalization. Our League has been relatively inactive in this area in recent months due to a shortage of volunteers to observe local government entities. Now, the LWVGB has been approached by Greater Birmingham civic leaders\* to assist the League in reactivating the Observer Corps and are offering their support. With this community help we will encourage greater volunteer participation in the program and provide a way to report observations to the public and to the media. We recognize the need to keep citizens well informed about government operation and action. Transparency is fundamental to a healthy democracy.

Carol Clarke, Community Reinvestment Act (CRA) Manager with Iberia Bank (see many civic and professional interests [here](#)), Haley Colson Lewis (Off-Board Director of LWVGB Observer Corps and President CAC Young Partners), Ann Smith (former LWVGB Board Director of Observer Corps), and Jean Johnson (President, LWVGB) are working together to develop a LWVGB Observer Corps Program that is consistent with LWVGB policies and that will allow both LWVGB members and non-members to participate as volunteer observers, provided that each volunteer is properly trained and certified by LWVGB to observe on behalf of the League.

Volunteers in the LWVGB Observer Corps will be trained and certified by the LWVGB. The board has appointed Ann Smith as Director of Observer Corps Training. She is in the process of developing the course and statement of certification. Ann will teach the course along with Nancy Ekberg and other well-experienced observers. Thank you, Ann and Nancy! Observer volunteers do not have to be members of the LWVGB, although we certainly invite and welcome all to join!

**On February 23<sup>rd</sup> at 5:30 – 7:00 p.m., all LWVGB members are invited to attend a LWVGB Observer Corps get-together event at SawWorks Studio (part of ArchitectureWorks). Let’s socialize and discuss the Observer Corps Program.** The League is also inviting civic leaders, educators, leaders of millennial groups, and interested citizens to learn about the LWVGB Observer Corps to see if this volunteer activity is right for them or their organization. Attendance does not obligate a guest to participate in the Observer Corps program. And some will be glad to know that there are several “stay at home” volunteer opportunities in this program. We want to share information about the Observer Corps project and answer your questions.



Thank you to the Richard I. Pigford Family, LLC, owner of SawWorks Studio/ArchitectureWorks, for allowing LWVGB to hold this event at such a wonderful venue free of charge! (The usual cost for an event at this venue is \$750!) Many thanks, also, to Carol Clarke who made the ask. The Pigford family is aware of the value of this project for bringing transparency and government accountability to our community. According to Carol, Dick Pigford, “believes in what we are doing and is very interested in supporting us.” They are proving it with this strong support!

An invitation to the LWVGB Observer Corps information get-together at SawWorks Studio/ArchitectureWorks was sent out on Tuesday, January 31<sup>st</sup>. Remember, attendance does not obligate you to participate. Let’s socialize and learn what this program can do to enlighten and empower the citizens of Greater Birmingham. We look forward to seeing you on February 23<sup>rd</sup>!

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Greater Birmingham civic leaders who have expressed their wish to assist LWVGB in rebuilding our Observer Corps include:

- Odessa Woolfolk - Founding Board Chair of the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute
- Ann Florie - Exective Director of Leadership Birmingham and former member Birmingham Water Works Board
- Joyce Lanning - Energy Program Consultant of Alabama Environmental Council and Board Member of LWV of Alabama
- Carol Clarke - Executive with Iberia Bank, former Director of the [Birmingham Department of Economic Development](#), and active with numerous Birmingham area agencies, committees, and groups
- Haley Colson Lewis - President of the Community Affairs Committee Young Partners (CAC-YP) and LWVGB Off-Board Director of Observer Corps

These leaders hope that the Observer Corps program will appeal to a number of organizations in addition to the LWVGB and that those organizations will be sources of volunteers for the LWVGB Observer Corps Program. It is also hoped that organizations can partner with the League in the future to form a Greater Birmingham Observer Corps that would be directed according to League-approved process and procedures. With a larger volunteer force, the program can become more robust - report on more government entities and boards, increase media attention, and thus provide more information and greater government transparency for the citizens of Greater Birmingham.

## MOVIE NIGHT AT AREA COLLEGES FEATURING “IRON JAWED ANGELS”

### Revisiting the Women’s Suffrage Movement in America

Arlene Godwin Woods, LWVGB Vice President & Development Director

Although the majority are of voting age and many have had the privilege of voting in at least one major election, a significant number of U.S. college students only have a cursory knowledge of the Women’s Suffrage Movement and its impact on voting rights in America, not just for women, but for all minorities.

The LWVGB will host an a movie night at several area colleges featuring *Iron Jawed Angels*, a historical drama that focuses on the Women’s Suffrage Movement in America. The League will target colleges that have a Women’s Studies program as well as those that offer relevant classes in political science, literature, history, gender studies, and feminist theory. Course instructors and student government leaders at each college will be contacted to find out the most opportune time to host the movie night; ideally the times will coincide with other student centered events and celebrations at each college.



Prior to showing the movie, members of the League will present a brief history of the Women’s Suffrage Movement and discuss how it shaped the need for advocacy and voter education. In addition, League members will share information about its voter services, membership, and volunteer opportunities.

The cost of movie admission, which will include light refreshments, will be around \$6. It is hoped that, after the cost of refreshments, at least 50% (\$3) of each admission charge can be realized as revenue for the League. All LWVGB members will be asked to support this endeavor by joining in the fun and fellowship.

Dates for the upcoming movie nights are targeted for March 2017. Look for specific dates and locations soon in the [LWVGB Calendar](#).

## VOTER SERVICES

### Grant Received to Continue Youth Voter Registration

Maggie Howard, LWVGB Director

The LWVGB has received another grant from the National League of Women Voters Education Fund to bring voter education and registration to high school and community college students. Tom and Maggie Howard wrote the grant and the LWVGB has been awarded \$500.00 for the project. With municipal elections slated this summer in Birmingham, the Voter Services Committee will focus on registering high school students in the city and community college students at Lawson State which draws heavily from the Birmingham Area. In addition we hope to return to Fairfield High and Minor High where successful registration events were held last spring and target Bessemer City. Education will focus on the importance of local elections and how locally elected official’s decisions impact the lives of all citizens in the community. We will be contacting our core of volunteers who were trained and worked hard last spring on our Youth Voter Registration Project and we welcome all other league members to get involved by contacting [Maggie Howard](#) or [Nancy Sales](#).

# WOMEN'S MARCH ON WASHINGTON

## Connie Arnwine, LWVGB Member

I attended the Women's March in DC along with my daughter and her friend Shayla in a trip that almost didn't happen because family members were concerned about our safety. We left Birmingham on Friday, driving 12 hours to Crofton, Md. to stay with Shayla's parents. Saturday morning we set out hoping to meet the LWV marchers at the pre-designated spot a few blocks from the National Mall the site of the March. We quickly discarded that plan because we learned that the nearby metro stop where we planned to park was closed. The parking lot was full. We drove into a nearby McDonald's to locate the next metro stop only to have 3 more carloads of women drive in behind us also trying to figure out the best way to reach the March. "This is going to be big," we thought. Thank goodness Carrie and Shayla are skilled users of social media. We learned that metro parking lots were already being closed because they were full even though it was still early. We learned that Baltimore MARC had added another commuter train but the trains headed to Union Station were running behind schedule because they were filled with people on the way to the March. We learned metro lines were packed and some trains were not stopping at all the metro stops along the way because they were too full. We headed into the District to Columbia Heights, an area we were familiar with because my son lived there several years ago. Fortunately the parking deck near Target had not filled and we squeaked in along with carloads of other marchers. The street outside the metro stop looked like a carnival. No exaggeration. Pink caps and signs everywhere and people were in a festive mood. Why didn't we think to bring pink caps? We talked about a sign, but there wasn't time to make one before we left and there were so many clever signs. We were hoping they would be collected after the March and they were. Many were left on the White House fence and others at various fountains and circles around town.



The information that March organizers had disseminated was correct - "there will be long lines at the kiosks to purchase metro cards." No one seemed to mind. Some trains blew through without stopping. When a train finally stopped for us and doors opened, we thought "no way can we squeeze in." But magically people moved back and we made it. "We are all going to the same place," someone said. Some one else said, "Everyone take a deep breath and make room as more people squeezed on." Once we were on the National Mall at the site of the March we never made it closer to the stage than the back one third of the crowd. I later thought that "Make Room" should be an unofficial march slogan because everywhere we went there were huge crowds and everyone was willing to make room: "make room wheel chair coming through"; "make room stroller coming through." If you watched the March on TV you had a much better view than we did. We never saw the stage, we never saw the Jumbotron. We would hear a roar start from the front of the crowd and we would pick it up. At times we chanted. At times we sang. We did not see angry protesters or people yelling and spitting on one another as one Alabama legislator recently claimed. What we did see were people expressing their first amendment right to peaceful assembly. We talked with people who came from all over the US. Everyone we spoke with said they came because they are concerned and they want their voices

heard in support of equality, voting rights, health care, women's rights, immigrant justice, environmental protection, etc. We saw the *Alabamians for Equality and Justice* sign, but could not get close to connect with our fellow Alabamians. We stood for over two and one-half hours until word made it through the crowd that we couldn't march, because WE completely covered the March route. No one seemed to mind and eventually there was a march after the crowds thinned out.

When I returned home, I told a friend that we were packed in like sardines. I later regretted that analogy. I think we were more like crayons being placed into a pack. We were all colors & all shapes & sizes proudly standing upright while being squeezed into a box with the box expanding but never tearing. Now comes the test. I admit that as a league member I haven't always called Congress or followed through with League recommendations whenever I received an action alert. I am recommitting to being a more responsible league member. I will keep up with league issues, I will follow through on action alerts. I will support the League of Women Voters and work to empower other women.



*Thank you for sharing your personal experience, Connie! We're glad that you and other Birmingham members joined in the Women's March on Washington. The LWV officially supported and participated in the march.*

## Board of Directors, 2016-18

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Starr Culpepper	Secretary (2017)
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Mikesha Harvill	Director (2018)
Margaret Howard	Director (2018)
Nancy Sales	Director (2017)

### Nominating Committee (2017)

Ida Tyree Hyche, Esq., Chair  
Starr Culpepper

### Off Board

Yvonne Brakefield Knowles	VOTER Editor
Ida Tyree Hyche, Esq.,	Advocacy
Haley Colson Lewis	Observer Corps

### QUOTABLE QUOTES

No written law has ever been more binding than unwritten custom supported by popular opinion.

~ *Carrie Chapman Catt*

Wise men speak because they have something to say; fools because they have to say something.

~ *Plato*

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